

2. Executive Summary

Analysis Conclusions:

Market: Downtown Catonsville currently functions as a moderate sized community shopping center with an appropriately scaled amount of associated office space. Downtown serves primarily a close-in market comprised of households living in the vicinity of the Catonsville "village". However, a few stores draw customers throughout the Baltimore metropolitan area.

Merchants find Catonsville a good place to do business. Operational problems associated primarily with parking and traffic cause some difficulty. However, business is generally good with sales on an upturn and a favorable outlook.

Shoppers enjoy the small town atmosphere of Catonsville. They like the convenience of Catonsville, the positive attitude of the merchants, and certain types of specialty goods sold by the merchants. They find parking to be a major aggravation and traffic somewhat so.

Most shoppers do not consider Catonsville their primary shopping area. They prefer to shop the larger supermarkets in the Route 40 corridor for food and other convenience goods. They buy their clothes and other shoppers goods in shopping centers located in the Woodlawn area, Columbia, and Towson.

Downtown Catonsville has approximately 225,000 square feet of retail sales space with another approximately 90,000 square feet of

space devoted to various types of retail services, personal services, and consumer financial services. This is roughly the size and composition of a moderate-sized community shopping center and is generally consistent with the population in Catonsville's market area.

Retail and office space rents are low to moderate. They are relatively low for retail, but generally consistent with rents for an older community shopping district. Office rents are consistent with relatively recently developed suburban class B office space.

Population and household growth in Catonsville's primary market area over the next ten years is expected to be modest. Nevertheless, such growth as will occur, plus a general increase in the wealth of households in the primary market, will generate reasonable increases in retail sales potential in the primary market area and the demand for new retail space.

Downtown Catonsville has to compete with other areas serving the market, particularly the Route 40 commercial areas, for retail demand. However, Catonsville is viewed as a special retail district. Its particular atmosphere should keep it

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competitive and make it possible to capture its fair share of the space potentials. In our judgement, there is a potential for 30,000 to 50,000 square feet of new retail space development in downtown Catonsville for the period of 1990-1995 with an additional 50,000 square feet possible 1995-2000. Any new retail development should be located on Frederick Road. Finding enough land to accommodate the retail potentials will be difficult.

The best way to implement the development of any new retail space in downtown Catonsville is to establish a "convenience specialty" marketplace which would complement existing stores and be similar to them in terms of merchant scale and character. The Belvedere Square complex serves as a good model for this kind of center. Clearing existing structures to create an area for such a development is not recommended. Should enough space become available, county officials and local developers and merchants should work together to develop such a facility. This is the kind of complex that could not easily be developed in a Route 40 context and would fit in well with the existing retail structure in downtown Catonsville.

Retailing currently works well in downtown Catonsville. Future planning and economic development efforts must be undertaken with care and sensitivity to the area's special character and somewhat fragile economics. This is not a fancy shopping area, but it is a successful one at its particular scale and characteristics.

Catonsville's current problems are primarily op-

The Legg Mason Executive Summary is a reasonably accurate synopsis of Catonsville 2000's concerns for our community; in general, we support the consultant's logic and recommendations. There are specifics with which our Board disagrees or which we might prioritize differently, detailed throughout the commentary found in the body of the report and summarized below.

LAND USE

The interaction of residential, retail, commercial, and institutional activity at a scale and density appropriate to a "smaller town" community is what gives Catonsville its "Village" character. Assuring that any new development which occurs, whether residential or commercial, blends harmoniously with that Village character is of primary concern. Infrastructure must be in place or be made available to support new development adequately, including roads, schools and appropriate open space and recreational facilities.

Catonsville falls below the accepted norms for provision of open space and recreational facilities. Any opportunity to expand these amenities should be seized as and when available. The old Middle School on Old Oionsbury Avenue, Spring Grove State Hospital, the Children's Home, a portion of the BGE E site - all these present opportunities, whether in whole or even a small part, to add to active and passive open space in our community.

Residential and commercial redevelopment possibilities centered around and near the municipal parking lot on Frederick Road are worth exploring as part of a unified and planned land study effort. The Belvedere Square concept discussed by the consultants as a retail anchor for the Village deserves consideration if appropriately designed and scaled. A comprehensive review of properties in this area could result in a plan for redevelopment beneficial to both residential and retail activity.

erational, not market. It is important that the following steps be taken to improve the business climate in downtown Catonsville and provide a basis for increased investment:

- Rationalization of and expansion of parking facilities;
- Organization of signage;
- Reasonable improvements and coordination of store fronts;
- Organization of traffic;
- Establishment of a merchants group to facilitate coordination of marketing, advertising, hours of operation, street appearance, and so forth.

Downtown Catonsville's continued success can be helped through reasonable growth in its primary market area. This means adding households and population (shoppers) by promoting compatible residential development in the Catonsville community area - on key sites and/or at infill locations previously bypassed by developers.

Traffic:
The citizens and business in Catonsville generate most of the traffic on Frederick Road; only 20% of the peak period vehicles are making through trips. Most vehicles circulating between parts of Catonsville must use Frederick Road because of the lack of nearby parallel streets and an adequate street grid pattern.

The large number of driveways along Frederick Road creates conflicts between turning and passing vehicles.

Frederick Road should be delineated with median islands and left turn lanes in the auto-oriented areas. The central village segment should have left turn lanes, but retain curbside parking and loading zones where possible.

On-street parking meters and the Parking Authority Lot meters should be set for higher parking rates and shorter duration (selected curbside meters). Increased enforcement of meter use and illegal parking is essential to maintain adequate supply for customers.

Improvements to the street grid pattern should include realignment of Egges Lane to meet Melior Avenue, extending Orban Avenue west to Egges Lane and upgrading Bloomingdale between Bloomsbury Avenue and Bishops Lane.

Off-street parking should be consolidated to reduce driveway entrances on Frederick Road, improve circulation between front lot and rear lot parking and provide more accessible rear lot parking. This may also improve circulation within the downtown area and reduce traffic on Frederick Road.

Design:
The analysis of the physical characteristics of Catonsville reveals a community with many assets in the process of change.

1. The village character is not consistent along Frederick Road at present. Three building patterns exist. The village character and small scale pattern should be reinforced and further erosion should be stopped.

2. Preservation of existing historic structures should be encouraged in the village core.
3. The historic character of many older buildings has been obscured by modern additions and signage.

MARKETING

We believe that improvement to the physical appearance of the "Village" is mandatory from a marketing and a design prospective. While the expense of substantial changes could be detrimental to marginal businesses, we believe that investing a reasonable amount of capital to brighten the facades of these establishments, spruce up facades and improve signage may in fact attract new business to these stores and more than pay for itself in the long run.

The consultants estimate that additional retail potential for Catonsville by 1995 could run from 30,000-50,000 SF, which, interestingly, is the recommended sizing for the Belvedere Square-type development concept. This boutique retail anchor concept has grown in favor with the consultants as the drafts of the study have progressed. Indeed, they devote two full paragraphs of their covering letter to the potential for this concept which the closing of the Hardee's Restaurant site has enhanced. From a marketing standpoint, we feel that the Belvedere Square concept deserves serious consideration and further exploration. Given the difficulties of assembling a sufficiently-sized parcel in the Village core to accommodate this type of use, and the availability of Hardee's site now, we recommend that immediate steps be undertaken to propose and review potential designs for such a concept. The adjoining property owners should be approached voluntarily to hold off requested development plans for adjacent parcels that might be incorporated into a comprehensive scheme until site development plan alternatives can be considered by all the interested parties.

Potential redevelopment planning for Spring Grove Suite Hospital is a minor concern. We need to work closely with the State of Maryland to be certain that, if significant portions of the property are redeveloped, infrastructure is available to support any more intense development. We need to take advantage of the possibilities that this site offers for both open space and recreational areas.

The consultants have recommended certain types of retail uses as additions to the current mix, as well as a potential mix for a Delverdere Square-type marketplace. In furtherance of these proposals, we recommend (as do the consultants) that both a detailed household study of the primary market area and a more sophisticated merchants' analysis be made to evaluate what additional goods and services might be profitably provided. County and/or private funds could be solicited to perform these studies promptly, since they are the basis upon which further marketing and developmental decisions should be made.

A program for establishing cooperative advertising and marketing strategies and creation of a viable merchant's association both need to be pursued.

TRAFFIC & PARKING

The three highest priorities in this category are as follows:

- 1) Installation of a traffic signal at Delrey and Frederick.
- 2) Improvement of Urban Alley as a convenient service road and to provide additional parking for nearby retailers.
- 3) Provision of additional municipal parking facilities in the 800-900 blocks of Frederick Road, identified by the consultant as the most highly utilized parking area in the Village.

Items #1 and #2 should be undertaken promptly as demonstration projects to get the implementation phase of the Catonsville Plan underway.

Better access must be provided to the existing municipal lot. We feel that a rear access would be invaluable and recommend that the adjacent rear property owners should be required to provide such access as part of any development proposal for the area.

- This is accomplished by:
- a. Slowing traffic on the belway by adding a median strip to the wide road and a traffic light at Delrey Avenue.
 - b. Narrowing Frederick Road at mid-block points in the village core section to allow for easier pedestrian crossing.

- c. Decreasing the number of curb cuts along Frederick Road (and resulting consolidation of parking lots).
3. Streetscaping to unify Frederick Road and to provide a village scale as desired.

This is accomplished by:

- a. Providing for gateways to Catonsville with low planted center medians and entry markers.
- b. A center median with trees, controlled signage, and planting in the auto-oriented "slip" area to bring it back down to village scale.
- c. Limited street trees in the village core, with increased on-street parking.

4. Improvement of building character to reinforce village character.

This is accomplished by:

- a. Architectural and Signage Guidelines.
 - b. Revised definition of R.O. zoning.
- This is accomplished by:
- a. Provision of service alleys in locations indicated.
 - b. Elimination of driveways and curbcuts resulting with an increase in curbside on-street parking.
2. A safer Frederick Road, both for pedestrians and vehicles.

For increased alternatives in auto travel paths in the commercial area, which will also help keep through traffic out of residential areas.

3. Rationalize parking - make it more accessible and convenient in areas that need it most.

4. Direct new activity and development to the village core.

5. Add additional residential units to the village, that maintain the scale and character to the village.

6. Maintain existing recreation space and develop a system of small civic spaces in the village core to complement the residential and institutional uses.

Recommendations: The main elements of the plan include:

1. Creation of a better road network in the village core area to allow for improved traffic circulation, increased service capabilities, and increased on-street parking.

4. Improvement of building character to reinforce village character.

This is accomplished by:

- a. Provision of service alleys in locations indicated.
 - b. Elimination of driveways and curbcuts resulting with an increase in curbside on-street parking.
2. A safer Frederick Road, both for pedestrians and vehicles.

We do not generally support removal of parking spaces from Frederick Road except where individual access near major intersections impedes traffic flow.

A special center turn lane analysis should be performed to evaluate its feasibility along Frederick Road. We do not support an extensive raised median island along the length of Frederick Road, but subject to engineering feasibility, would recommend consideration of some sort of Cul-de-sac treatments at both ends of the Village.

Parking meter fees for premium spaces on Frederick Road need to be raised substantially and meter hours shortened to encourage use of the municipal lot and private parking.

Private driveways and private parking lots should be consolidated and connected wherever possible to reduce access points on Frederick Road and encourage shared parking. Development of rear parking lots and rear access to retail stores should be a priority item.

Enforcement of parking restrictions needs to be re-emphasized.

ARCHITECTURE AND STREETSCAPE DESIGN

We support the concept of attractive gateways to the Village, but prefer that medium islands may not be the only or best solution. Attractively landscaped islands extending into the parking lane, decorated with architectural grade lighting fixtures and appropriate signage may achieve the same end and work more efficiently. The answer to this issue is best achieved by an engineering feasibility study to see what works and a design proposal to gauge its aesthetic impact.

Tree planting along Frederick Road is a desirable goal, where there is sufficient sidewalk width to accommodate this landscaping and as long as it does not obscure retail store visibility or signage.

We wish to emphasize as a high priority the need to encourage facade removal and signage guidelines along Frederick Road and throughout the Village. We recognize the financial impact requiring exterior improvements may make on small businesses, but urge strenuously that reasonable guidelines should improve business results in the long run. We believe that facade and signage guidelines should be adopted, applicable to all new construction and renovation activity within the Village Study Area, and that compliance with such guidelines should be reviewed and enforced as an integral part of the development approval process. We request that the Planning Board adopt the Catonsville Plan architectural and signage guidelines within the revision to the County's CHDP manual currently being undertaken by the Office of Planning and Zoning.